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## A Critical Analysis of Teaching Language Learning Strategies to University in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** Over the last 40 years, plenty research has extensively examined the role of learning strategies on the language acquisition/learning. In Indonesia, unfortunately, this issue seemingly receives less attention at least until 2000's. Perhaps, Setiyadi's (2001; 2004) and Mistar's (2001) work which both studied students' learning strategies in a university degree could be declared as the first batch of strategies-oriented research, and followed by Subekti & Lawson (2007) and Mistar & Umamah (2014). Generally, the studies were descriptive or correlational in which depicting the types of strategies that the learners employed, or sought a relationship between learning strategies and the learners' academic achievements. Strikingly, none elucidated strategy-instruction as the key priority. In fact, this is vital to ensure whether these strategies really could help poor language learners in practice.

**Keywords:** critical analysis, learning strategies

### I. INTRODUCTION

This is certainly not to say that exploratory studies are less beneficial. Only, there seems an immediate demand to translate the research's result into a real practice, which is in the classroom. As the initial goal of Rubin's (1975) paper, the investigation should not only stop at finding how these good language learners successfully acquire the language, but they should be also ideally transferrable and teachable to the poor language learners so that it helps their learning become more effective and successful.

This paper addresses two main issues regarding how the learning strategies should be taught in the EFL context. First, should the strategies be integrated in the language course or taught separately? Second, what language can be used in the strategy instruction? I shall begin this paper by tracing the development of LLs since its emergence until today. I will review the prominent research that grounds this paper as well as reporting its key finding. It is followed then by the current trend that the most recent research has proposed. Following this, I will discuss the main issues of separated or integrated learning instructions, as well as topics related to the language of instructions. I conclude this paper by highlighting the key ideas and then suggesting the potential area that can be explored for future research.

It is Rubin (1975) that plays a key part upon the deployment of language learning strategy issues through her seminal paper entitled "what the good language learners can teach us". The article actually begins with an intriguing belief that if we can understand how the good language learners (GLLs) study, then we can replicate the similar system to help poor learners in their effort to gain a learning success. She identifies several key attributes which belong to the GLLs. According to her, GLLs are typically good guessers, keen to involve in a communication, generally inhibited, attending to form, doing repeated practice, monitoring their own progress, and attending to meaning. In short, those characteristics can be grouped into direct and indirect strategies.

Ten years later, having departed from numerous previous literatures, O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, and Kupper (1985) paraphrase the term direct and indirect become cognitive and metacognitive strategies. They also separate the role of interpersonal communication and then introduce the additional category namely socioaffective strategies. Possibly, the most popular conceptual theory is written by Oxford (1990). This has grounded countless research particularly in relation to the assessment of learning strategies used by the learners. She developed a well-known inventory called Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). In her book, the learners'

strategies are broken down into 6 categories: memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, social, and affective strategies.

Beside the strategy classification, another captivating story during the development of language learning strategies is perhaps the fact that they remain to leave a conceptual disagreement among the researchers. Borrowing Griffiths' (2008:83) term, this area of knowledge is "notoriously difficult to define". It even occurs at the level of selecting and defining the term strategy itself. Since its emergence, "strategy" is not the only term that has been used. There have been some other terminologies for example learning behaviour, tactic, or self-regulation, although "strategy" is still used more widely among the researchers. Likewise, there is no fixed consensus regarding what language learning strategies really mean. Rubin (1975) relates learning strategies as "techniques or devices", while Oxford (1990:1) describes them as "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning". But, Griffiths (2008:85-87) perhaps provides a more comprehensive definition. She defines language learning strategies as "[a]ctivities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning". They involve observable (e.g. physical processes) and unobservable activities such as memorising in mental processes. She also correctly inserts the feature of consciousness which implies that the learners have a freedom to choose certain strategies that fit to them.

Furthermore, research is at odds concerning to how the good language learners differ from their lower counterparts. Porte (1988) argues that the poor learners employ more or less similar strategies to what the good learners do. They perform repetitions, write translations, or use a dictionary although the manner these learners employ the strategies is indeed less sophisticated. It is an anomaly because the common knowledge believes that the good language learners really have a wider collection of learning strategies than their learning counterparts (O'Malley et al. 1985; Oxford 1990) and at the same time they employ the strategies more frequent as well (Griffiths 2008). O'Malley et al. even report that the GLLs have a learning strategy repertoire three times larger than the poor learners. Although this claim requires further investigation, I would agree to the fact that GLLs have a larger strategy repertoire and frequently recalled the strategies to accomplish their learning task. Nevertheless, Porte's explanation could be also used as a reminder that there is always an exception rather than overgeneralising this assumption to all poor language learners across the situation. This is particularly when it is "involving real and infinitely complex human beings" (Griffiths, 2008:89).

Although Chamot (2004) indicates a tendency of a decreasing research on language learning strategies after 1990's, she also implies that there is still many work to do in this area. Strategy inventory, terminology, and classification are some areas that have been debated for a while and do not seem to reach their immediate consensus. Furthermore, the need to bridge between research and pedagogical practice is still under a serious attention by the researchers. The issues

are to do with types of strategy instructions (integrated vs separated), the language used for the medium of instruction, and the practical steps that the teachers could directly implement in their classroom (Chamot 2004).

It should be noted too that Griffiths (2008) has notified about the importance of embedding strategy instruction into textbooks and teacher education. In other words, the support that the teachers receive should not be merely in form of the teaching method, but also they need to be equipped with a resourceful working environment. The task in the textbook should ideally encourage the learners to practice certain strategies to accomplish it. Here, the teachers play a role to help the learners identify their preferred strategies and guide them to use strategies in doing the task in the textbook. In addition, Chamot (2005) and Griffiths (2015) emphasis the role of teacher education in which it can be beneficial as an initial place to raise the teachers' awareness towards learners' learning strategies. It is because not all teachers are aware and capable of teaching learning strategies. What the traditional teachers do is somehow feeding the learners with a direct solution without helping them develop their own learning strategies.

Since the new millennium, the focus of research on language learning strategies in Indonesia remains at classifying the strategies employed by the language learners (e.g. Setiyadi 2001; Setiyadi 2004; and Mistar 2001). In 2001, Setiyadi concludes his report by revealing that the Indonesian learners are more favourable in using metacognitive strategies. This encouraging finding is supported by Mistar (2001) when he records similar characteristics of the good language learners in his university. From the finding, it is clear that the learners unconsciously have been able to manage their own learning. What becomes the teachers' responsibility now is to facilitate the students to develop these strategies so that they know exactly in which task situation they need to use the strategies and how to use it more effectively. If this scenario occurs smoothly, both researchers believe that it could lead the learners to the higher stage of learning, namely the autonomous learning.

Furthermore, other research has also reported that the learners' strategies have a positive correlation with a high academic accomplishment, for instance: between learning strategies and speaking proficiency (Mistar&Umamah 2014) or learning strategies in acquiring new vocabularies (Subekti and Lawson 2007). Therefore, these findings might be a good starting point if we would refer to the initial goal of Rubin's article; that is to transfer this success into the poor language learners. The Indonesian research may already have a positive provision to extent their focus on to the more pedagogical-oriented research although it should be admitted that this is still a big rock for researchers as well as teachers in Indonesia.

## II. METHOD

This paper was conducted on the basis of Critical Analysis approach. The studies were descriptive or correlational in which depicting the types of strategies that the learners employed, or sought a relationship between learning strategies and the learners' academic achievements.

### III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Having discussed the issues on language learning strategies, this section devotes to illuminate how the learning strategies from those good language learners could be incorporated in the classroom. It hopefully provides a new insight especially for teachers and researchers in Indonesia where learning strategy instruction remains somewhat unfamiliar. Due to the inadequate space, of many teaching-related issues, we just pick two of them: (1) explicit and integrated instructions, and (2) the language used in the strategy instruction.

#### 1. Explicit and Integrated Strategy Instruction

With regard to its application, teachers really need to think about the explicitness of the strategy instructions. This is connected to the clarity of what, when, why, and how to employ particular strategies. It includes raising students' awareness on their own learning strategies, strategy modelling, practicing with new strategies, evaluating their own learning, and transferring the acquired strategies to new tasks (Grenfell & Harris 1999; Oxford 1990; Chamot 2004; and Chamot 2005). This explicitness has been documented positive in relation with the students' improvement in listening (O'malley et al 1985), speaking (Cohen 1999), and writing (Gu 2007). Hence, the first thing that Indonesian teachers need to consider is how to assure their instruction explicit. By explicitly explaining and modelling a suitable strategy for the learners, it is hoped that they would get accustomed to learn with the strategies that make their learning become more effective. Later, when the learners have used learning strategies for quite a long time, the strategies would be part of the learners' habit and automatized in the brain. Thus, the learning process can be faster and more importantly, the learners would benefit their own learning even when the teachers are not around them.

While scholars seems to voice a uniform agreement to the explicit instruction, Chamot (2004) points out that it is reversed when the question is directed to whether the instruction should be embedded (integrated) in the language task or it is taught separately as a single course. The idea of integrating the strategy instruction in the language course is advocated by O'Malley et al. (1985), Oxford (1990), Grenfell & Harris (1999), and Cohen (1999). On the other hand, Gu (1996) who challenges this integrated-instruction idea argues if the strategy instruction is integrated to the language curriculum, the possibility to transfer to the other non-language lesson becomes more difficult. In addition, it also requires the teachers who understand about language learning strategy itself. Since not all teachers familiar with learning strategy, "it is easier to plan for one separate

strategy course than to prepare all teachers to teach strategies" (Weinstein & Mayer cited in Chamot 2004:19).

It is the latter issue that makes the integrated instruction in Indonesia is rather challenging, that is the issue of teachers' competence and readiness to insert learning strategies into their day-to-day teaching agenda. There seems no positive evidence that language teachers in Indonesia have the ability to teach the learners to learn, at least at the meantime. Also, less interest of research on language learning strategies can be cited as an indicator of its unfamiliarity among the Indonesian researchers and teachers. In fact, one deciding factor in running an integrated strategy instruction is the teachers' capability to match the appropriate strategies with the students' need (Oxford 2011). If the teachers fail for example in assessing/identifying the learners' preferred strategies it would be difficult for them to choose a suitable strategy for their students.

In addition, less skilled teacher in the strategy instruction would increase the possibility of teaching mismatch in its application. It should be noted that the strategy transfer should be done in a very careful manner. Although some strategies are quite prevailing to help the good language learners handle their learning tasks, it is not automatically allow the teachers to copy the strategies uncritically without a deep analysis of the learners' need. Studies (O'Malley et al, 1985 and Porte, 1988) have confirmed that there is a resistance from the learners to apply learning strategy that does not fit them. Even though they apply it, the learners admit that they only use it in front of the teachers and will change it again once the teacher leaves. Consequently, the training becomes less effective. Hence, the teachers should understand that it is not simply a matter of transmitting the learning strategies, but rather the instruction should guide the learners to actively use and develop their own strategies as well as to add a new strategy that they might have not known yet. Therefore, in this sense, teaching the learning strategies in a single course would be more feasible.

Indeed, a separated type of strategy instruction has its own drawback. One of which is the fact that conducting a strategy instructions out of the teachers' working time might increase the teachers' workload. Although not all teachers are selected to teach, but the selected teachers may feel tired and overwhelmed. Furthermore, this type of strategy instruction is not considered cost-friendly. If the institution conducts a strategy-instruction class, it means to spend extra budget for the teachers' salaries, the material books, and other physical facilities. This is also the reason why educators tend to avoid such a training because the integrated strategy training promises to reduce this time and financial burden.

In the light of this, the training may be done in a short course form in order to minimise the expenditure. In addition, previous studies (Setiyadi 2001; Mistar 2001) also report an appealing finding regarding the university learners' preference to use metacognitive strategies. In this regard, the training can be directed to train and strengthen these strategies. The learners could learn about how to plan,



monitor, and evaluate their own learning. Therefore, the ultimate result will not end by the time the course finishes. It is hoped to occur continuously as such metacognitive strategies encourage the learners' autonomy because they can plan, practice, control, and evaluate their learning by their own in their spare time.

## 2. The language of Instruction

The second issue that the teachers need to take into account is concerning with the language that they must use during the instruction. It can be understood that the use of L2 in the strategy instruction could foster the strategy development of the learners. It is not surprising then if academics (Gerfoll & Harris, 1999) suggest the teachers need to expose the learners to the target language as much as possible.

However, teaching learning strategies in the EFL context such as Indonesia is not necessarily the case. Many research reports that Indonesian students are less proficient in communicating in English especially those who live and study in the disadvantaged areas (Adi 2011; Yembise 2011). Consequently, using L2 as the main medium of instruction would only create a barrier for the students in understanding the strategy instruction. They would hardly struggle in listening the teachers' explanation and thus fail to totally comprehend of why and when they should use the specific learning strategies.

To respond this, Chamot (2004) and Oxford (2011) agree that L1 can be used in the situation where the learners are at the beginning level. Also, it can be implemented when all learners use the same language as the teacher's language. This is to assure that the explanation can be absorbed well so that the learners are motivated to practice the strategies in their learning tasks.

Interestingly, a combination of L1 and L2 is also documented successful to achieve the goal of the strategy instruction. Ozeki (2000, cited in Chamot 2004) for instance conducts a study to Japanese College students. In the process of the strategy instructions, the teacher uses a simplified English. Also, the questioners, the journals, and the checklists are written in English. Interestingly, there is no strict rule that demands the learners to respond in English. In other words, they are allowed to respond in their first language. Yet, all the actual process including the strategy practice is conducted in simple English.

Essentially, once the teachers decides to use L2 as the medium language, it is very crucial to consider the students' readiness. Although the students are at the university level, typically they have a low proficiency in English. Thus, the combination of both L1 and L2 might be suggested. In addition, Oxford (2011) recommends to present visual aids, gestures, or posters that might help compensate the gap between the teachers' intended message and the learners' comprehension.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Given this fact, the chance for integrating strategy instruction in the language subject in the school is still far from being convincing. But rather, the need to train the teachers for example in a teacher training seems more urgent. It would be better to develop the teachers' expertise in advance while the qualified teachers teach the language learning in a single course separately. As no or little publication that provides strategy instruction manual or handbook in Indonesia, the teachers could adapt from the more established strategy training programs (see Oxford 2011 p. 177-179 for the examples). When most teachers have been familiar with the language learning strategies, then they can start to integrate the strategy instructions into their language course at the university.

As the result of the discussion, it should be noted that this conceptual paper is limited in a number of points. First, it is absent to provide a step-by-step procedure of the strategy instruction. Thus, further research could be directed to develop such a thing so that it could give the teachers a clear guidance in tutoring their students. Second, it seems necessary for the stake holders in Indonesia to enhance the teachers' expertise in the field of language learning strategies. This could be achieved by providing the teachers a strategy training led by a more experienced teachers or the educators. Additionally, advocating a novice teacher to observe the experienced teachers in teaching learning strategies could be helpful as well. Finally, although the theoretical beliefs strongly recommend the teachers to employ the strategy instructions in their classroom, there is lack of information regarding how effective this training would help the learners enlarge their learning strategy repertoires and achievements. Similarly, the answer of in what extent such a training plays a role in the learners' learning is also not straightforward. Therefore, research in the future could be intended to resolve these problems.

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